

less thorough than it could be). The penultimate chapter puts a further spin on this analysis by also situating sensational serials at the center of a culture war over gender roles, analyzing the “pleasures and dangers” of the serial queen (the prime example is Pearl White) as a figure of the American “New Woman,” and how that figure could have appealed to women (and men) of most classes. A further chapter then reverses the direction of the book’s intertextual investigation, exploring the “tie-in” marketing practices that sensational serials helped to promulgate, from fashion designs to early fan magazines.

Finally, Singer’s generosity encompasses much more than the nearly 100 illustrations that support the book’s analysis or the extensive twenty-five pages of bibliography. For one, he deals unusually even-handedly with his colleagues’ objections to the modernity thesis and accepts potential disagreement with certain of his arguments. For another, he concludes the book with a number of provocative questions intended to encourage further research, research that could not only extend or modify but even counter his own invaluable work.

SELECTED BY: RICK ALTMAN

Ben Singer, *Melodrama and Modernity: Early Sensational Cinema and Its Contexts* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2001)

(What follows is not a normal review. Knowing that Richard Abel was reviewing Ben Singer’s *Melodrama and Modernity*, I exceptionally requested permission to review the same book, primarily to draw attention to a single aspect of the book’s coverage. This review should thus be thought of not as an independent statement, but as a complement to Abel’s general review)

Ben Singer’s recent book on *Melodrama and Modernity* is in many ways a book to admire.

Both of the topics implied by the title are complex and controversial, yet the book handles them with extraordinary clarity and generosity. Few important topics have been as shamelessly neglected by scholars as stage melodrama and film serials; Singer rectifies that situation with easily the best chapter ever written on stage melodrama and two solid chapters on film serials. Furthermore, this book boasts the most interesting illustration program of any recent film publication (though it is surprising and disappointing not to discover more frame enlargements from a wider range of serials). From cover to cover, not only are the research and scholarship first-rate, but they are supported by writing that is both forceful and clear.

The overall quality of Singer’s book makes it all the more disappointing to note that this major work on melodrama devotes hardly a word to the *melos* that distinguishes melodrama from just plain drama. It is well known that stage melodrama and melodramatic film serials were both accompanied musically. Did this music not contribute to the experience and meaning of stage and film melodrama? It is a sad statement regarding the state of sound scholarship that such an otherwise good book should entirely ignore such concerns.

To be sure, there are easier problems to handle than music for stage or screen. It is important to recognize, however, that substantial resources are available in this area. On other topics, Singer makes very good use of Lewin A. Goff’s outstanding 1948 Western Reserve University dissertation, *The Popular Priced Melodrama in America 1890 to 1910 with Its Origins and Development to 1890*, but he draws little benefit from Goff’s substantial material on melodrama music. More recently, two scholars have produced a series of careful and well-documented articles, chapters, and books on music for stage melodrama. The following works by British theater scholar David Mayer will be found useful:

“Nineteenth Century Theatre Music,” *Theatre Notebook*, vol. 30, no. 3 (1976), pp. 115-122.

Henry Irving and The Bells (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1980), p. 82.

“The Music of Melodrama,” in D. Bradby, L. James, B. Sharratt (eds.), *Performance and politics in popular drama: aspects of popular entertainment in theatre, film, and television, 1800-1976* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980), pp. 49-63.

D. Mayer, M. Scott (eds.), *Four Bars of “Agit”:* *Incidental Music for Victorian and Edwardian Melodrama* (London: Samuel French and The Theatre Museum, 1983).

“Parlour and Platform Melodrama,” in M. Hays, A. Nikolopoulou (eds.), *Melodrama: the cultural emergence of a genre* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1996), pp. 210-234.

“Seeing With the Ear,” *Nineteenth Century Theatre*, vol. 25, no. 1 (Summer 1997), pp. 66-77.

“A ‘Secondary Action’ or Musical Highlight? Melodic Interludes in Early Film Melodrama Reconsidered,” in R. Abel, R. Altman (eds.), *The Sounds of Early Cinema* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2001), pp. 220-231.

The following writings by the American musicologist Anne Dhu Shapiro/McLucas will be found especially helpful:

“Action Music in American Pantomime and Melodrama, 1730-1913,” *American Music*, vol. 2, no. 4 (Winter 1984), pp. 50-72.

“Nineteenth Century Melodrama: From *A Tale of Mystery* to *Monte Cristo*,” *Harvard Library Bulletin*, New Series, vol. 2, no. 4 (Winter 1991), pp. 54-73.

Later Melodrama in America: Monte Cristo (ca. 1883) (New York-London: Garland, 1994).

The latter book provides all the elements – text, music, director’s cue sheet – necessary to document the intermittent nature of late-nineteenth-century melodrama accompaniment practice. In the same series, Thomas L. Riis’s edition of *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* (New York and London: Garland, 1994) will also prove useful.

Unfortunately, no similar bibliography is to be found on the music accompanying film serials. Until current projects reach publication, the only solution available is careful scholarship. While relevant materials are not

easy to locate, they are no more impossible to find than the many contemporary newspaper and magazine articles cited by Singer.

The problem here is of course not Singer’s alone, but that of the entire profession. For reasons having to do with the low status of sound and non-musicians’ fear of music, silent film sound has not been approached with the determination characteristic of recent work on virtually all other aspects of silent cinema. Of all possible topics, I would have thought that stage and early film melodrama could not possibly be treated without attention to their music. I was wrong. Perhaps this short non-review will encourage future scholars to consider music as an essential aspect of their efforts.

SELECTED BY: FRANÇOIS ALBERA

Germain Lacasse, *Le Bonimenteur de vues animées. Le cinéma “muet” entre tradition et modernité* (Québec-Paris: Nota Bene/Méridiens Klincksieck, 2000)

Le livre de Germain Lacasse possède une qualité plutôt rare dans le domaine de l’histoire du cinéma, en particulier en langue française, il explore un aspect mal connu, met à jour une dimension oubliée du spectacle cinématographique sur la base d’un travail d’ampleur dans des sources négligées jusqu’ici et il émet une thèse inscrivant le cinéma dans un ensemble plus vaste, celui de la “modernité” et des pratiques sociales de son temps. L’aspect (encore) mal connu, c’est celui du “bonimenteur de vues animées”, un commentateur, un narrateur, un conférencier ou un camelot, selon les opinions, qui verbalise avant, pendant ou entre les images en direction des spectateurs. L’émergence de cette figure, insoupçonnée il y a encore dix ans, a bouleversé considérablement l’appréhension qu’on peut avoir des conditions de réception des films muets des premiers